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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002139

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: LONG MARCH ENDS WITH NO DECISION ON JUDICIARY

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 2096

[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 2117

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: On June 14, the "Long March" of the lawyers' movement ended quietly in Islamabad, leaving supporters disappointed, disgruntled and no closer to a solution on the judicial restoration issue than when the march began. Organizer Aitzaz Ahsan was widely criticized for allowing Nawaz Sharif and opposition politicians to hijack the march and turn it into an anti-Pakistan People's Party/anti-Musharraf event. Nawaz proved he could deliver a crowd (albeit much smaller than promised) and the event did increase pressure on Asif Zardari to speed Musharraf's departure from office. Zardari responded by reminding Nawaz the PPP still has the real muscle to put people in the streets and predicting the PPP would soon control the presidency. Many interpret this as a signal that Zardari wants to become President himself. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In the early hours of June 14, the lawyers' Long March led by Aitzaz Ahsan ended quietly in Islamabad. Official estimates put the number of demonstrators at 20,000-25,000, far below the promised hundreds of thousands. The media touted the demonstration as the largest ever civil society protest in the capital, and the marchers remained peaceful under pre-agreed terms with the GOP.

[1](#)3. (C) The group included lawyers and some human rights advocates, but many civil society leaders avoided the Long March because it had become increasingly politicized by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI), whose leaders all delivered strong anti-Musharraf speeches in Islamabad. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari ordered the government to accommodate the marches but urged PPP workers not to participate. Ahsan was widely criticized for allowing the politicians to take over and turn it into an anti-PPP, anti-Musharraf event.

[1](#)4. (C) In the end, the demonstrators had little to show for their efforts. Ahsan had promised that the March would not end without the restoration of the pre-November 3 judiciary and the resignation of President Musharraf. However, it concluded with Ahsan being accused of striking a "backroom" deal with the GOP to end the demonstration. Nawaz Sharif, despite his rhetoric, also urged the demonstrators to go home. In his address to the crowd, Ahsan noted that no decision on the restoration had been made, ultimately agitating approximately 50 disappointed young lawyers to attempt an unsuccessful sit-in at the Parliament House. On

June 16, the Pakistan Bar Council asked forgiveness by the various legal fraternities for not supporting this sit-in concept, calling it an honest mistake that "benefited Musharraf and his cohorts."

15. (U) PML-N Leader Nawaz Sharif made good on his promise to join the marchers and also addressed the crowd. In his speech, he pointed the finger at the Parliament, some of whose members in turn covertly blamed Zardari for the delay on the judges' restoration. Nawaz suggested that Musharraf should be "hanged" for his acts during the State of Emergency and not given a safe exit from office. Nawaz backtracked publicly from his party's support for budget legislation increasing the size of the Supreme Court from 16 to 29 justices, saying that the judges who took the oath under the November 2007 State of Emergency should not remain on the bench.

16. (C) Despite the small size of the crowd, it was bigger than any group Nawaz has been able to deliver since his return to Pakistan in 2007. In response, Zardari noted in a June 16 address to party supporters that the PPP would show Pakistan what a "real" long march was, a reminder of the PPP's ability under Zulfakir Ali and Benazir Bhutto to really turn out the masses. Zardari also answered critics who accused him of continuing to support Musharraf by publicly predicting that the presidency would soon be in the hands of the PPP.

17. (C) Comment: Originally designed to support the judiciary, the Long March became a vehicle for a political

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protest against the PPP's insistence on restoring the judiciary without the former Chief Justice and his bid to oust Musharraf. Civil society and the media criticized Ahsan for giving JUI-F and PTI, parties which boycotted the election, a platform and for allowing Nawaz to hijack the march. The march did increase pressure on Zardari to restore the judiciary and speed efforts to remove Musharraf from office. But the crowd's low numbers validated the PPP view that the common man was more interested in food and fuel prices than the makeup of the Supreme Court. The next chapter will unfold as the budget, with its provision to increase the size of the court and thus allow the deposed judges to return, is approved. Question remains over whether that court will include Iftikhar Chaudhry and what moves Zardari will take to ease Musharraf out of office. End comment.  
PATTERSON